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ABSTRACT

The author presents his opinion that educational evaluation has much similarity to the nonfiction narrative, (defined as a series of events ordered in time), particularly as it relates a current situation to future possibilities. He refers to Stake's statement that evaluation is concerned not only with outcomes but also with antecedents and with dynamic transactions between teacher and learner. He contrasts the complex humanistic approach of a story teller who seeks to present unity and order in experience so as to arrive at a judgment, with the approach based primarily on measurement and prediction. The principal difference between the historian or the story teller and the evaluator is that the evaluator must always include the estimation of merit or worth. The evaluator must participate in the situation being evaluated, and this participation will have an impact on the evaluation. (CTM)

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EVALUATION AS STORY: THE NARRATIVE QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION

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INTRODUCTION

In 1967 Robert E. Stake published the "Countenance of Educational Evaluation." In this far reaching paper he spoke of the need to examine, not only educational outcomes but also the antecedents and transactions that exist prior to, and effect these outcomes. Stake defined antecedents as the conditions existing prior to teaching and learning; transactions are the countless and dynamic interactions between learner and teacher. Stake argued that the evaluator must build descriptions and collect judgments of the events being evaluated. Shortly after its publication the "Countenance" paper was lauded for having "opened the evaluation data matrices."

After Stake came the deluge, as more evaluators began to see that a variety of evaluation strategies other than those associated with measuring educational outcomes could be utilized in evaluation research. Kelly (1975, p. 87) argued that "literary criticism and curriculum evaluation have a number of characteristics in common." Stake (1972) wrote that "the first duty of the evaluator should be to offer the client a comprehensive portrayal of the program." Parlett and Hamilton (1972) discussed the shortcomings of the "agricultural-botanist type evaluation" in the study of innovative programs and presented an alternative approach called "illuminative evaluation." Illuminative evaluation has as its primary concern "descriptions and interpretation rather than measurement and prediction." The case study method was advocated by MacDonald and Walker (1973) as an educational research tool; they called it an "examination of an instance in action." House (1973) wrote of the

need to "demodernize evaluation" and advocated a new evaluation technology that would be directed "toward greater coverage and recognition of the human experience." Kemmis (1974) described the utility of portrayal evaluation; it harnesses sources of representation previously ignored by the evaluator--those of the ethnographer, novelist, and photographer." Elizabeth Vallance (1975) alluded to the work of John Mann (1969) and argued that "a curriculum, regardless of its objectives and outcomes, has a unique and practical 'lived in quality' which is immediate, experiential, and essentially aesthetic." David Hamilton (1976) in an historical overview of the case study method claimed "case-study research in education has emerged as a counter-image to survey research." Robert Stake (1978) in a philosophical-historical study of the case study method in the social sciences supports the method because "its best use appears . . . to be for adding to existing experience and humanistic understanding." Stake goes on to claim that "Case studies are likely to continue to be popular because of their style and to be useful for exploration for those who search for explanatory laws."

After re-reading these authors, I was struck by a unifying characteristic which seemed so apparent in each article--the disenchantment with evaluation techniques which stress a product-outcome point of view, especially at the expense of a fuller, more holistic approach which sees education as a human endeavor and admits to the complexity of the human condition. Each author argues that instead of simplifying the issues of our humanity we should, in fact, attempt to understand ourselves and education in the context of its complexity.

Implied in all the previous articles is the idea that the determination of worth which Scriven (1967) sees as the goal of evaluation

rests upon the evaluator's understanding not only of the outcomes of education, but also on his understanding of the vast array of intricate and sometimes paradoxical events which precede those outcomes. Implied in this recognition of the conditions and transactions which precede any outcome is the assumption that the evaluator will be able to capture and convey his understanding to a client.

The principal thesis of this work is contained in the argument that evaluating is story telling and that the primary activity of the story teller is narration. I argue further that it is through narrative that people vicariously come to know what was observed and how it was observed. Narratives document the order of events in time. Evaluating education means ordering a series of events in time; it is telling or creating a story. Narrative deals with time and actions over time, and it is only within the context of time that process can be understood. Without time, there can be no process. An evaluation that understands and stresses process must deal with action over time. Narrative is believed to be, then, a necessary condition for any process-oriented evaluation.

This proposal sketches the arguments for the primary thesis by showing how the narrative quality of evaluation can be understood in relationship to other disciplines - history, literature, and anthropology - which also claim to have a narrative quality about the way that knowledge is sought and ordered. I intend to demonstrate that some of the problems and issues generic to these fields are also relevant to the activity of evaluating. The issues to be discussed are:

1. The problem of ordering and unifying past experience into an understandable body of knowledge.

2. The problems of describing and judging, especially in the field of history, and how subjectivity and personal judgment are dealt with by the historiographer.
3 The role of the evaluator as a participant in the evaluative process.
4. The idea of action over time and its relationship to the narrative quality of evaluation.

THE NARRATIVE QUALITY OF EXPERIENCE*

It was the Jewish novelist, Elie Wiesel (1972) who said "God created man because he loves stories." We all love stories. In both primitive and contemporary societies the story teller is held in high esteem. Why? Aristotle may have partly answered this question two millenia ago when he contrasted poetry and history in the Poetics. He stated that while history must faithfully adhere to what has been, poetry is free to treat what will be as well as what has already taken place. For Aristotle, history was mired in the unchanging scheme of things gone by. Poetry, on the other hand, was the fulcrum balancing the tension between the finite past and the infinitely possible future. Poetry is capable of looking both backward and forward. A loose translation of the classical Greek word for poet is "one who makes." The poet, then, is a fabricator, a creator, someone who brings order from disorder. To think poetically is to create an ordered unity from a myriad of past experiences. Although the poet draws upon past experience, unlike the historian, he is capable of recreating that past into any future that is meaningful to him. He is capable of creating his own story.

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* This title is used verbatum from the work of Stephen Crites (1971) whose schlolarly research in this area has greatly influenced this paper.

The idea of story is apt to call to mind the words "fictitious," "untruthful," and others--all of which are viewed suspiciously by those who seek "truths" through the conventional methods of the social sciences. Yet, this view of story as something other than factual truth is relatively new to Western thought. There is an extensive tradition beginning with Plato--including the Church Fathers, the medieval balladeers and singers of songs, and Vico--that views story in a more didactic and less suspicious light. In earlier times narrative--which is defined fundamentally as the combined presence of a story and a story teller (Scholes and Kellogg, 1966, p. 4) was perceived in two modes. The empirical mode was composed of historical and mimetic forms of narrative and was aimed at what was then known as scientific knowledge. The fictional mode emphasized the artistic or intuitive ways of knowing and was composed of the romantic and didactic forms of narrative (Scholes and Kellogg, 1966, pp. 13-14). Neither mode of narrative was considered superior to the other, rather they were simply seen as different ways of processing information about the world, different strategies for bringing the seemingly random universe into a more orderly and unified perspective.

EVALUATING AND STORY TELLING

Evaluating is story telling and all evaluators are story tellers. This statement rests upon the previous expansion of story and narrative. It reflects the activity that evaluators are engaged in--evaluating. Within the context of evaluating we can sense Aristotle's definition of poetry, the backward view (historical perspective) and a forward vision (poetic perspective). Evaluation has been defined in a number

of ways. One point of view that seems to cover a multitude of evaluation perspectives describes it as "a process designed to gather information that will yield descriptions and judgements of both effectiveness and worth in order that decisions be made." (Diamond, et al., 1975) In this context the activity of storytelling and the activity of evaluating are similar--both attempt to document action or activity over time. Forster (1927) has defined story as "a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence." If one takes seriously Forster's definition of story, then it appears that evaluators have been working within the metaphor of story for years. Even the strictest Tylerian evaluation model, employing the most concrete and measurable behavioral objectives, tested against a battery of complex psychometric devices, assumes not only a past--the behavior already taught and performed--but also a future when the behavior will be performed again.

If the evaluator is a story teller, what differentiates his activity from that of other tellers of tales--the novelist, the historian? Or conversely, how are these activities similar?

The differences between the evaluator and the novelist and historian can be seen in their goals. The goals of evaluation must "always include the estimation of merit or worth" (Scriven, 1967, p. 42). The goals of the novelist or historian may be limited by other constraints but the estimation of worth is not one of these.

The similarities between the novelist, the historian, and the evaluator are based on their shared interest in the <u>story they are telling</u>. The key words are underlined because they are crucial to an understanding of the fundamental components of narrative mentioned earlier: the presence of both a story and a story teller. In telling a story the teller

is engaged in an activity that is as old as human language. It is a most human endeavor. It is an activity that has its origins in the oral and sacred traditions of pre-literate humanity.

It was through the telling of its story that the pre-literate tribe transmitted its history from generation to generation, thus maintaining its links with the mythic past. The story teller was a person of high tribal status within the oral society. The story told was held constant in a memory that had not yet been dulled by the advent of the written word. It was through the vehicle of the story that the tribe or clan retraced its ancestral roots to a time when survival was less precarious, more certain--a mythic time when the tribe more fully participated in the fruits of a more benevolent environment. The story spoke of great leaders from a golden age and gave the tribe a sense of control, a feeling of understanding in an otherwise hostile and chaotic world. In other words, the story gave meaning to a rather fragile existence. It was an umbrella that shielded the tribe from a debilitating preoccupation with the dangers of existence and helped mold the uncertainty of the world into a semblance of order.

It is this same desire to bring order from chaos and unity out of diversity that moves the novelist to attempt to unify past experience into a new representation of meaning through narrative. Camus (1956) wrote "there is not one human being who, above a certain elementary level of consciousness does not exhaust himself in trying to find formulas or attitudes that will give his existence the unity it lacks." It is this desire to bring unity out of the diverse experiences of the past that is the common goal of the contemporary novelist and the primitive story teller.

The historian shares the same concerns with the story teller and the novelist. He also seeks a unity of meaning and understanding. He uses his historical facts to this end as a means of ordering both collective and individual experience. The limitations of history as outlined by Aristotle force the historian to focus his gaze on the past--but this does not detract from his need to understand and order the world as it exists, now. Indeed, the very purpose of historical knowledge is not simply factual accuracy concerning the past but an understanding of things present. (Lukacs, 1968) This understanding can be seen as an attempt to find a unifying factor in the apparent random events of our past experiences singularly as individuals and collectively as society.

The same claim can be made for the evaluator. Like his more creative counterparts--the story teller, the novelist, the historian--he, too, seeks a unity, an order, a sense of understanding. His attempt to simplify the vast array of data that he confronts in the evaluative process is the same activity of bringing order to unordered input. Scriven alludes to this need to unify, to make the complex more manageable, when he says that the evaluator's task is "to try very hard to condense all that massive data into one word: good or bad." (Scriven, 1969)

By telling their stories, the story teller, the novelist, the historian and the evaluator all attempt to bring order and unity to their experiences. They choose that which is to be included within the scheme of things to be ordered and understood, and they decide what will be excluded, unordered and untold. These choices are matters of judgment.

For the primitive storyteller it is a judgment already made and consciously unalterable except under threat of blasphemy.*

JUDGMENTS, DECISIONS AND PARTICIPATION

Judgment is a more obvious characteristic in the activities of the novelist, the historian, and the evaluator. The novelist's freedom to judge what will be included in his story is self-evident--witness the divergence in theme, style, and content between D.H. Lawrence and Harold Robbins or Thomas Mann and Ernest Hemingway. In contrast to the novelist, the idea of the historian or the evaluator as only a gatherer and processor of facts is simplistic and highly erroneous. Geoffrey Barraclough (1963) in History and the Changing World writes, "The history we read, though based on facts is strictly speaking not factual at all, but a series of accepted judgements." This reliance on judgment was pronounced as early as 1874 when F.H. Bradley wrote the first substantial philosophical critique of history in English: The Presuppositions of Critical History. He states, "The historical event (in a limited sense of the word history) involves in the first place judgement." (p. 90) Bradley was concerned with the problem that no one transmits a literal picture of an event, rather specific aspects of a selected event are included or dismissed. Van A. Harvey (1969) believes the choice is an intellectual one and presupposes the presence of judgment.

The warrants of judgment are not unique to the historian. The evaluator must make choices about what to include in an attempt at ordering the events that he is evaluating. Stake (1967, p. 52) makes this claim, "In the matter of selection of variables for evaluation, the

* Although the specific content of the tribal story is less fixed than the tradition or myth upon which it is based, over time the tradition itself can change, slowly accommodating itself to the changes in the cultural and physical milieu.

evaluator must make a subjective decision." House (1971) even admits, "We measured the program at perhaps its point of greatest strength--that's what I mean by being fair."

The issues involved in judgment and the subjectivity involved in making judgments are important to remember. A formal evaluation can not take place without an evaluator and the biases, beliefs, and assumptions that are an integral part of any self-conscious person. There is no evaluation without an evaluator just as there can be no story without a story teller. Just as the story teller's participation is necessary for narrative, the evaluator's participation is necessary for an evaluation. Like the stage manager in Wilder's Our Town, the evaluator is both narrator and an integral part of the narration itself. Wylie Sypher (1968) in Literature and Technology speaks to the issue of this type of creative participation. He argues that implicit within Aristotle's discussion of mimesis--the idea of artistic imitation--is a recognition "that art is not only imitation but also a mode of participating" (methexis). Sypher contends that this interaction between imitation and participation is based on Aristotle's belief that art is a craft (techne). A craft is a physical activity that requires a learned skill enabling the craftsman to improvise and participate within the established limits of his craft.

For a better understanding of the concept of participation or methexis it may help to return to the realm of the oral story teller. In once sense the preliterate story teller is "objective". He is concerned about the characters in his story and speaks only of them and their actions and not of himself. The story teller shares with his audience a god-like view of the story. Together, the story teller and his

audience know more about the characters of the story than the characters could know themselves. But at all times the center of attention is the story and its characters. The preliterate story teller refuses to risk the structure of the story by making any reference to himself or to his feelings about the evants that are occurring and the characters to whom these events happen. (Scholes and Kellogg, 1966, pp. 50-53.)

This is similar to the role of the evaluator in an evaluation. The evaluator and, depending upon his reporting ability, his audience are often in a position to know more about a program and the people engaged in it than the people themselves. The evaluator does not gain this knowledge by remaining aloof from the study for fear that his professional "objectivity" will be questioned, but rather he participates in the study, much in the same way as the primitive story teller does with his story. David Hamilton (1976) believes that the evaluator or researcher should immerse himself in the data and gain a thorough knowledge and close involvement of the situation under investigation. Kelly (1975, p. 92) makes a similar claim when he states, "One thing that is absent from most curriculum evaluations is the sense that the evaluation was conducted by a real person who had some stake in the matter and who actually responded to the performance." Evaluations are done by real people and have an impact that is felt by other people. The issues involved in evaluating educational phenomena are complex because they are issues that also concern our own humanness.

THE NARRATIVE QUALITY OF EVALUATION

Since Stake's "Countenance" paper there has been a growing division in the field of educational evaluation. One point of view argues for

an increased utilization of complex statistical methods in an attempt to explain the various components of the educational process (Cooley and Lohnes, 1976). Siding with this perspective are those who see evaluation as a technology that will help us measure and assess student behavior and outcomes (Baker, 1973; Tyler, 1942, etc) and those who pursue educational evaluation under the rubric of social science research (Cronback, 1963; Gagne, 1967). Lining the field on the opposing side are Stake (1967, 1972, 1978), House (1973), Hamilton (1976) and Parlett and Hamilton (1972)among others who argue for a widening of evaluative strategies to include case study, portrayal evaluations, and other methods that attempt to more fully describe the happenings of an educational phenomenon. To understand the gap that exists between both groups I examined the 1978 American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting Program. Some of the session titles that accentuate the rift between the "hard" technologists and the "soft" technologists are as follows: "Should Educational Evaluation be More Objective of More Subjective?" "Case Studies in Science Education: An NSF National Review," "Testing/Evaluation in the Schools: Measurement Issues," "Philosophy and Psychometry: Will the Two Worlds Ever Meet." The fact that professionals in the field of educational evaluation believe that there is a disparity between methods is evident. But are the differences they perceive real?

If one considers the methods, or the means that these two divergent groups employ in their evaluation activities then there is an obvious and sometimes painful difference. These methodological differences are manifested in the extreme by two important works. Evaluation Research in Education by W.W. Cooley and P.R. Lohnes (1976)

provides an eloquent argument in favor of a complex quantitative paradigm for the analysis of the educational process. Malcolm Parlett (1977) argues for a more holistic approach to evaluating that stresses understanding of the complexity being evaluated rather than analytic evaluation. However, if one looks at the activity of evaluating that both groups are engaged in, and goes beyond the tools that are used in this activity, the differences disappear. Both evaluation points of view must deal with process, and the documentation of an educational phenomenon through time. Cooley and Lohnes (1976) emphasize this several times in the beginning of their book. "Evaluation is defined as a process rather than a product." (p. 5). They believe "Evaluation research must be thought of as investigation of certain links in . . . an endless chain" (p. 12). When these descriptions of the activity of evaluating are paired with others, even those who disagree with Cooley and Lohnes on methodology, the similarities of the activity outshine the differences in method. Stake (1967, pp. 48-50) implied a dynamic process in modeling evaluation inquiry when he urged evaluators to consider the antecedents that precede teaching and learning and the transactions that characterize the interactions between learner and teacher as well as the educational outcomes. Walberg (1974), giving reasons for titling his book of evaluation readings Evaluating Educational Performance writes, "'Evaluating' suggests a more active process or technique than does the static abstractness of the word 'evaluation'." Popham and Carlson (1977) make several allusions to the relationship of evaluation process to time in their article "Deep Dark Deficits of the Adversary Evaluation Model": "...for the better part of a year we were intermittently involved in carrying out an adversary evaluation." Rippey (1973)

describing transactional evaluation states "Transactional evaluation is concerned with the system undergoing change rather than with the outcomes of the system's activity." Time and the documentation of educational activities over time are essential to evaluating.

Time is an essential component of how anything functions. How something functions implies action, and time is a necessary condition of action. (Sontag, 1977) In other words, evaluating attempts to help us understand what we do, how we act over time. Again it is Robert Stake who reminds us of this when he quotes the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey:

> Only from his actions, his fixed utterings, his effects upon others, can man learn about himself...What we once were, how we developed and became what we are, we learn from the way we acted (Stake, 1978)

The entire scope of evaluation inquiry from the use of complex statistical methods to the narratively-based case study with its "N of one" can be summed up in Dilthey's words, "We learn from the way we acted." We learn through our experiences in time.

If we learn from our experiences over time, we must ask what is the best way to document this temporal movement. Stake, Hamilton, Walker and McDonald, and others advocate the use of case study. They may be correct in as far as case study mirrors, to some degree, our human temporality. This may be the subtle strength in case study and portrayal-type evaluations, they are essentially means of telling the story of the phenomenon being evaluated by narrating the movement of the phenomenon through time.

Narrative and time are inextricably tied together. Gertrude Stein (1935) has defined narrative as "what anybody has to say about

anything that can heppen, has happened or will happen in any way." Thomas Mann (1964) echoes Stein "time is the medium of narration, as it is the medium of life." Finally, Stephen Crites (1971, p. 291) concurs with Stein and Mann when he argues that "the formal quality of experience through time is inherently narrative."

The evaluator, like the primitive story teller, the historian, and the novelist is a chronicler of things gone by. In simplest terms he tells us what happened, what happened next and so on. In the re-collecting of his observations of an educational phenomenon he creates one story out of many possible stories. How these recollections are perceived is a highly personal point of view. Two hypothetical people with hypothetically identical experiences would single out different, although probably similar recollections of their past. They might see certain experiences as more meaningful than others and thereby put more value on remembering these events rather than others. Furthermore, whatever their remembered experiences may be, they will be limited to a one-way, linear time frame; this time frame is flexible in content but not in structure. Different events may be recalled so that at one time a person might dwell upon a childhood Christmas, and at another moment the wedding of a friend. This is the flexibility of content. The structure, however, remains constant. We can not imagine ourselves old before we were young; we are in effect, caught in time. Stephen Crites discusses this structure:

> The memory also has its order, not the recollected order formed by thought and imagination, but a simple order of succession. This succession is the order in which images of actual experience through time have

> been impressed upon the memory. It constitutes a kind of lasting chronicle, fixed in my memory, of the temporal course of my experience. (Crites, 1971, p. 299)

Narrative may have utility in educational evaluation not only in what is being told--the content--although content is a critical component of any good story. Rather, narrative may be the vehicle that best imitates our experience in time. Narrative has meaning because it mirrors the complexity of the human condition over time; it documents how we paradoxically change and grow older while at the same time remain the same persons. It is through narrative, and its components the storyteller telling his story, that we come to <u>understand</u> our temporal complexity.

It is on the issue of complexity that the proponents of case study, portrayal evaluations and other alternative evaluation strategies seem to mount their most persuasive argument. Stake (1973) stressed the need "to convey holistic impression, the mood, even the mystery of the experience." House (1973) warns against the over-simplification of scientism. "The empirical delusion is that what we see is all that exists or can exist. . . . It confuses behavior with humanity, appearances with reality." Stake and House and their like-minded colleagues, sense that complexity is something that should <u>not</u> be ignored or hastily covaried out of an equation. They view the conditions and activities of education as very intricate and very human.

Case study, illuminative evaluation and portrayal evaluation--because of their narrative quality--are valid methods to use in an attempt to understand the complex nature of being human, and the equally complex activities that being human implies. These methods

sacrifice the analytic focus of explanation, that is necessary for prediction and control, for the broader picture that is required for understanding. The stories they tell are stories that encourage understanding; they are the stories of human-kind engaged in continual change, constant evaluation. There is no end--just process. All evaluating, regardless of methodological assumptions, must mirror this process, this temporal passage and help us in our understanding of "the way we acted."

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